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THE NEW IRELAND.—II.

A GENERAL SURVEY.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

A COUNTRY and a people with such a history as I have sketched must needs be abnormal. Most of the evils that have afflicted Ireland may, indeed, be paralleled, one by one, in the case of other nations; but in Ireland alone have they operated in conjunction and simultaneously, or with only so brief a break in their consecutive malignity as gave neither time nor opportunity for recovery or escape. There is no one cause, just as there is no one remedy, for Irish ills. Geographical isolation and an enforced national exclusiveness need not in themselves have differentiated Ireland any more, for instance, than they have differentiated Norway. Other countries have been as bitterly torn by the clash of racial strife. The vitality of tribalism in Ireland finds an even exaggerated counterpart in the persistence of the clan system in the Scottish Highlands. Conquest, followed by the eviction of the natives from the soil and by their social, legal and political repression, has been one of the most common phenomena of European history. A soft and sensuous climate, a lack of mineral resources and a preponderance of pasture have not prevented other lands from developing an industrial spirit in prosperity and contentment. The commercial restrictions imposed upon Ireland in the eighteenth century were nothing exceptional. Religious persecution, though in Ireland it assumed the unique and peculiarly revolting form of the persecution of a majority by a minority, has ravaged nearly every Continental country for far longer periods and with immeasurably greater savagery. The drainage of emigration, the secular ascendancy of Catholicism, the instability of party government, inadequate education, a con-

tinued stress of political agitation, an almost chronic scarcity among the masses, and the agricultural revolution wrought by Free Trade—not one of these is a factor peculiar to Ireland alone. It is their concurrence, the fatality of their combination in Ireland, the interplay of all of them at once or in breathless succession, that constitute the distinctive tragedy of Irish history. Had they come singly or at long intervals their effects might have been thrown off. Coming, as they did, in close-pressed and devastating battalions, with little or no chance for the recuperative principle to resist their convergent sweep, they have infected the whole body politic and left a penetrating mark, not only upon the structure of Irish society, but upon the character and mental instincts of the Irish people.

It is a commonplace of observation that there are two Irelands, and, as with most commonplaces, its significance is somewhat blunted by repetition. Not until one travels through the country, observing and cross-examining, does the phrase assume the meaning and proportions of a fact. There are, indeed, two Irelands, divided from each other by barrier upon barrier. It is not alone that three-fourths of the people are Roman Catholics, while the remainder belong to one or other of the Protestant sects. It is not alone that among the Catholics the Celtic strain has curiously persisted, while the Protestants approach more nearly the Lowland Scotch and the English types. It is not alone that Catholic Ireland, speaking broadly, is poor and agricultural, and Protestant Ireland prosperous and industrial, or that the majority feel themselves to be the true natives of the soil, while the minority still retain something of the spirit of a superior colonizing caste, or that there should lie between them seven centuries of social, religious and agrarian strife, or that on the master question of Irish politics they still irreconcilably differ. Not one of these elements of separation and contentiousness, taken by itself, would have sufficed to give the visitor his curious consciousness of passing in and out between two worlds, almost between two civilizations, each unintelligible and repugnant to the other. What makes up the full sum of the uniqueness of Ireland is that the factors of antagonism and discord, by the diabolical chance of history, coincide with and reinforce instead of cancelling each other. Class distinctions in Ireland are not mitigated by political agreement; differences of creed are not assuaged by a harmony

of economic interests; the cleavages of racial temperament are not, as in other countries they are, bridged over by a sense of national unity. On the contrary, all the bitterness of caste and creed, of political and material antipathies and contrasts, instead of losing half their viciousness in a multiplicity of cross-currents, are gathered and rigidly compressed in Ireland into two incongruous channels. Throughout the country you infer a man's religion from his social position, his social position from his religion, and his views on all Irish questions from both. The inference, to be sure, is not invariably correct. There is still left a remnant of the old Catholic nobility and gentry whose political sympathies have nothing in common with those of the great bulk of their co-religionists. In Dublin, the "Castle" Catholic, the Catholic, that is, who has identified himself with the English system of government and with the social circle that centres on the Viceregal Lodge, is a common enough type; nor is it by any means the case that Catholic landlords have had less trouble with their tenants, or have been less exposed to agrarian outrage, than Protestants. The struggle for the land in Ireland has always evoked an intensity of feeling that has overridden the claims of religious and political communion, and the agitating Protestant tenant is as familiar in Ulster as the oppressive Catholic landlord in Kerry or Wexford. Nor is it here alone that the two Irelands cross and merge. There are several thousand Protestants in Ulster who are the stanchest and most determined of Home-Rulers. About a sixth of the Irish Nationalist Party at Westminster is composed of Protestants, and it is a remarkable and significant fact that, with the exception of O'Connell, nearly all the great leaders of the Irish nation during the past century and a quarter have belonged to the Church of the minority.

But, in spite of an overlapping at this point and at that, the two Irelands remain not deliberately, still less defiantly, but instinctively separate. The social and religious cleavage runs sheer down to the foundations. It is buttressed and perpetuated by the policy of the Catholic Church, and the Protestants, for their part, show no real inclination to break it down. The members of the two faiths are educated almost altogether apart; they may mingle in after-life in business or politics or the professions, but for all social purposes they retain a mutually exclusive aloofness; there is little bigotry, except in Londonderry and Belfast, but on the

other hand there is little intimacy. As a general rule, Protestants and Catholics in Ireland do not intervisit or hold any genuine intercourse together. In the social clubs, you will hardly find one member of the old faith to every score or fifty of the new; and that is not because sectarian intolerance penetrates further in Ireland than elsewhere, or even because the profession of the one creed or the other carries with it historical implications and significances of wider import than in any other land, but because the two sects are for the most part restricted to different social levels. Throughout Ireland the upper classes are all but exclusively Protestants. Their old political ascendancy has been torn from them, but their social and industrial supremacy remains. You soon come to take it for granted, when passing from one village to another, that the "big house" of the neighborhood is owned by a Protestant. You soon learn to be surprised, on making the circuit of the towns, if you find a single one of the principal industries in Catholic hands. The small tradesman, the retail shopkeeper, may be a Catholic; but the large manufacturer, the bank manager, the railway director, the ship-builder, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, is a Protestant. And, whether in town or country, the Protestants form inevitably an aloof and self-contained coterie of their own, feeling themselves in character, education, culture and enterprise the members of both a superior class and a superior civilization. The upper classes among them, the landlords and the gentry, distinguished beyond any other body of men by the numbers of their titles, whose origin the tactful visitor will refrain from inquiring into, hardly regard themselves as Irish at all. Their eyes are turned Englandwards; they speak of "the people," even when with the utmost kindness, much as an Indian civil servant might speak of the natives around him; they carry with them the consciousness of an eternal separateness; they have chosen, in short, to be English instead of Irish and Imperialists instead of Nationalists. For that choice they will stand eternally condemned by history, but history will also remember that few classes of men have ever developed a more winning or virile type of character, or have produced a greater number of gifted soldiers and administrators. As an aristocracy, they must be held to have failed, to have failed so badly that they have had to be bought out; but as individuals among a leader-loving people they have still, if they will only

seize it, a part of immense utility and beneficence to play in Irish life. Their relations with those about and below them, while frequently marked with a great outward friendliness and sympathy and much charitable zeal, lack altogether those amenities, that basis of mutual attachment, that placid revolution round the feudal centre, which have been the strength of the English squirearchy. Throughout rural Ireland, the sense of common interests between class and class seems almost to have perished. And, even among the great manufacturers of the North, all of whom, without, so far as I know, a single exception, are Protestants, one finds the same aggressive aloofness. Trade, as a rule, is a potent antiseptic to mitigate the poison of political and sectarian feuds; but fate has so willed it that the magnificent industries of Londonderry and Belfast should find in Ireland their workshop but not their market. Their business is almost altogether an exporting one, and this unquestionably has been a factor of considerable moment in preventing a true understanding between North and South, and in keeping the two classes, races and creeds apart. One comes at last to accept it as almost normal that Protestants and Catholics, when they meet at all in Ireland, should do so in one or other of the innumerable relations of employer and employed. There is, of course, the exception of sport, and especially of such sports as have to do with horseflesh. What the Irishman does not know about horses is hidden even from the Afghan or the New-Englander, and in the buying, selling, training, racing and hunting of horses there is probably more unforced mingling of the classes and creeds than in all other connections put together.

But while in Ireland the Protestants, though numbering only a quarter of the population, are thus socially, territorially and industrially in the ascendant, their political power has been whittled down to almost nothing. Of the 103 members who represent Ireland in the House of Commons, only 20 are Unionists—and Unionists and Protestants, with the deductions I have already touched on, are roughly synonymous. There are thirty-three county councils in Ireland. In fourteen of them the Unionists have not a single representative; in eight they have only one apiece; in twenty-seven, out of a total of 780 councillors, the Unionists are no more than 23; and in the whole thirty-three they are outnumbered by more than six to one. In the towns and

cities it is just the same. The whole machinery of local administration, in fact, outside Ulster, is in the hands of men whose chief claim to election is that they are Nationalists in sentiment, and who represent neither the wealth nor the experience nor the best brains and capacity of the country. The Unionists complain bitterly of their exclusion, but I cannot see what other fate they could possibly have expected. A majority long harassed and thwarted, often persecuted, always looked down upon, finds itself in sudden possession of political power. What can be more inevitable than that they should use that power against those who have oppressed them in the past, and who still retain most of the characteristics of an alien and dominant caste? An impartial student of Irish history can only, I think, marvel that the retribution should be so slight. Exclusion from nine-tenths of the local administration of the country is, after all, but a mild penalty for the numberless crimes committed against Irish well-being by the British "garrison." Human nature could hardly be satisfied with less; historical justice might well demand more. The local Nationalist bodies are indeed frequently grotesque enough. They pass the most flamboyant resolutions on matters with which they have not the least concern; their debates and their manner of conducting them are often uproariously comical; they "play politics" with a tireless assiduity; most of their appointments are friendly, good-natured "jobs," and they restrict the offices in their gift almost entirely to Catholics and Nationalists. But, when they can be induced to attend to their proper business, they carry it through with a quite adequate efficiency. Irish county government is no worse to-day under popular county councils than it was ten years ago under the old grand juries in which Protestants and Unionists almost exclusively predominated. There is no religious persecution; there is no discrimination in the matter of rates; the Irish peasant and the Irish farmer are even keener than most men in seeing that they get their money's worth; and the general ostracism of the upper classes is due not to their religious but to their social and political creed. I am persuaded that that ostracism is not a permanent condition. Many movements are at work to break it down; but, for the present, it is sufficiently effective to deprive the 250,000 - odd Unionists in the three southern provinces of practically all share in both local and Parliamentary government.

It is not, however, on any local issue, but on the penetrating problems of the land and of Home Rule, that the two Irelands part most decisively. The genius of Michael Davitt, by linking the agrarian question with the national question, the desire for more land with the desire for self-government, incalculably reinforced the intensity of both demands. No one can yet say positively whether the Irish agitation for autonomy is or is not a self-sufficing movement, or what vitality it will possess when deprived of the agrarian tumult and unrest which for thirty years and more have been its backbone. There is at present a peace in the country such as Ireland has not known for more than a century. Landlordism is being expropriated; a peasant proprietorship is being evolved; before another twenty years have passed the work of seven and a half centuries will have been undone, and the soil of Ireland will have been handed back to its original owners. So gigantic a revolution raises some profound and many-sided issues, and on these I propose to touch later on. For the present, I must content myself with a few general observations. The great scheme of land purchase which is now in operation will have settled, when completed, one question only, the land-tenure question. It has been the curse of Irish history that rent and ownership should hitherto have absorbed the agricultural energies of the country. How much could be got out of the land has been of little account compared with how little could be paid for it; and the concentration of both landlords and tenants upon the sole issue of rent has been morally and technically disastrous to true agricultural progress. That issue is now by way of being determined; the tenant, by the lavish help of State credit, is being converted into a freeholder. This means, of course, that the main source of internal strife is being dammed at the fountain-head. But it also means that the Irish peasant and the Irish farmer are brought for the first time face to face with the realities of a competitive agricultural existence, and that their well-being from now onwards depends on their own labor and efficiency. The policy of land purchase, in short, has cleared the ground, has laid the foundations of a new social order, has brought or is bringing a long and vitiating conflict to a close. But the restoration of agrarian peace, while an essential condition of agricultural prosperity, is very far from being prosperity itself; and, even if it were not complicated in Ireland by an

infinity of cross-currents, it could not in the nature of things do more than provide an opportunity, an opportunity which it rests wholly with the people themselves to neglect and stultify or to make the most and best of. Nothing, therefore, could be more fantastic than to suppose that the mere transfer of title-deeds in the soil from landlord to tenant has induced, or by itself can ever induce, the Irish millennium. Moreover, it will take, as I have said, twenty years at the lowest estimate to complete the transfer itself. There are many landlords who have refused to sell under the Wyndham Act, and to these some form of compulsion will have to be applied. Again, in the barren and backward West, where the best land is given up to stock-raising and the peasants lead a life of appalling destitution on their wretched five-acre holdings of bog and stony moor, there is a fierce agitation for the partition of the grazing-lands. We have not, therefore, by any means seen the last of agrarian unrest and possibly of agrarian outrage in Ireland. The peace of which I have spoken is relative only. It may not again be broken in the old convulsive fashion, with the murders of landlords and their agents, the houghing of cattle, boycotting and arson, and an entire society thrust by every ingenious weapon of organized terrorism into a condition little short of anarchy. Ireland at large has advanced beyond that stage; but what is true of the country as a whole is not true of every section in it. Here and there, in this locality and in that, the "bad times" may be again reproduced on a smaller scale, in a more modified form, but with effects not less ruinous and demoralizing than of old.

More than any country I am acquainted with, more even than Poland itself, Ireland is a network of "organizations," leagues, societies, factions and cliques. Almost every department of life seems to be on a committee basis; individual action and individual opinion are everywhere marshalled in subservience to the interests of this movement or of that. There is, perhaps, no land in which there is more volubility of speech and less real liberty of thought than in Ireland. A genius for combination penetrates to the lowest strata, is indeed among the peasantry almost an instinct, and an instinct cultivated with more than Sicilian aptitude. The associative qualities innate in tribalism and fostered by centuries of repressive government and by the impulse of class and racial warfare have blossomed into a talent for con-

certed agitation such as even the most professional of American politicians might envy. Indeed, just as on its religious side Irish life to-day curiously suggests the Spain of three hundred years ago, so the scheme and spirit of Irish politics have the unmistakable flavor of modern America. The Irish emigrant to the United States is a graduate in all the arts of Tammany Hall before he lands; the rigging of conventions, the theory and practice of "pull," the whole science of manipulating opinion, he has learned and applied at home. But, whereas Tammany Hall confines itself mainly to politics, its essential principle takes on in Ireland a far wider sweep and embraces not only politics, but the land and the private and social as well as the public life of the people. Mr. Stephen Gwynn has even remarked that "it would be hardly too much to say that Catholics in Ireland form among themselves—without intention and even without knowledge—a huge secret society, like all secret societies amenable to a special code." There are villages and towns in Ireland by the score where the spirit of faction works much as it worked among Guelfs and Ghibellines and Montagus and Capulets, where the streets are apt at times to ring with the blows of contending rivalries, and where little or nothing is done or attempted without reference to the desires and susceptibilities of this or that group. And the whole field of politics, which through the intimacy of its connection with the land yields the people their main occupation, has been, I need hardly say, meticulously surveyed and parcelled out. The landlords, quite apart from the Orange Society in the North, have their own federations for mutual assistance, for providing, for instance, caretakers on farms from which the tenants have been evicted, for furnishing the sinews of war in the protection of their class interests, and for deluging England with lecturers, leaflets and peripatetic orators in support of Unionist principles. But, naturally, it is among the Nationalists and the farming classes that organization has been most developed. Such a body as the United Irish League, which has a branch in pretty nearly every town and village in the country, and works the whole machinery of political and agrarian agitation, is a far more effective power than the British Government, and its decrees command an obedience that is systematically refused to the King's writ. There are at least a dozen other organizations on a smaller scale, but of a similar

character, some purely political, some confined, in the main, to the interests of a section or a class—the town tenants, for example, or the agricultural laborers—some literary or athletic or industrial or “benevolent,” but all strongly imbued with the sentiment of Nationalism, and all carrying on a vigorous propaganda. The strongest of them, of course, are those that are linked with the agrarian question; for, while Nationalism in Ireland is a sentiment, the land is life, and anything that touches the land touches also the mainspring of Irish existence. An eviction is still the signal for something in the nature of a local uprising; the “land-grabber” who rents a farm from which the previous tenant was expelled is still a marked man; and juries, unless carefully packed by the Crown, still refuse to convict any man who is charged with an agrarian outrage. The landlords are by no means the only, in these days are not even the chief, sufferers by the action of these various organizations. An unpopular member of a local branch of the United Irish League, or one who has offended the local trader and publican who, with the priest, dictates its policy, or one who has sinned against the unwritten agrarian code of the neighborhood, or who belongs to a faction that has fallen under the displeasure of another and more powerful faction, is just as likely to be boycotted and intimidated, to have his business ruined, his supplies cut off, his cattle maimed, his crops trampled, his buildings fired and his comings and goings attended by a mob blowing horns, as was ever a landlord or his agent in the worst days of the Land League. It is one of the first things to be realized about Ireland that coercion, in some form or other, is the rule of life, and that, as organized opinion in a country so torn with internal feuds is always extreme opinion, men of moderate views and peaceable inclinations are overborne and silenced. With but a slight variance of degree, this holds good for both Unionist and Nationalist Ireland, and opinion in Belfast and Portadown is scarcely less tyrannized over by the Orange Society than in Mayo or Galway by the United Irish League. “Terror and greed,” I was told by the only impartial man I came across in Ireland, a priest, a Nationalist, yet a most candid and clear-eyed observer—“Terror and greed—those are the operative forces of Irish life and politics.”

SYDNEY BROOKS.

(To be Continued.)